

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 42

A Cultural Context for the Kinder-Morgan Pipeline.

I don't know about you but I'm getting tired of hearing about the Kinder Morgan Pipeline battle. We keep getting the same arguments day after day and things are going nowhere. If the case goes to court nothing will be solved. There will be winners and losers... and the losers will be bitter as they go forward into the future for the next battle.

In my last chronicle I talked about the need to develop a new context that will bring both sides closer together. And in previous chronicles I've talked about the need to create a new cultural context to deal with our human systems. I've been looking for a science that deals with both climate and culture.

I've found one. It is called Cultural Climatology. It studies how cultures deal with climate—and it seems to be just the kind of discipline we need.

Cultural Climatology

Cultural climatologists deal with contexts—how climate change develops new contexts that are built into cultures. As some anthropologists have noted, humans don't live within cultures. *They live culturally.* They incorporate into their culture those elements they see as essential in the world around them.

We can see how this is playing itself out in the Kinder-Morgan battle. Those supporting the pipeline focus on the neo-liberal economy with its need for constant profits from resource development. They “culturalize” the dominant economy.

The environmentalists do something similar. They focus on the damage caused by the threat of a large increase in the number of tankers, the danger of spilling the oil (dilbit) into the ocean and the damage to the environment and its species. So they “culturalize” the need to protect the environment at all costs.

Each side then is “living culturally” —taking into their group or corporate cultures those elements that are consistent with their own pre-determined consciousness contexts.

Is it possible to create a common ground?

Not unless both sides realize that we are living in a new world—the Anthropocene world. Both sides must move beyond their current fixed mindsets and recognize the need to share a new world context. Though our tendency is to build upon our current technology which can be very helpful we must go way back to the time before human laws to a different cultural context, a time that is still reflected in various indigenous cultures around the world. So we develop our new culture from both the past and the present.

The Requirements

First comes a basic overriding principle. Since we are dependent upon Earth and its resources for our continued existence, our activities must be guided by a basic principle: ***To create a mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth.***

Second, the evidence from 97% of the world's environmental scientists is that we are moving into a new kind of world in which we are having a profound and damaging effect on Earth's limited resources. The most obvious sign is the global warming that is affecting our existing civilization.

Third, the major causes of the problems are the economic systems, often supported by political systems. They are based upon neo-liberalism: the need and right of corporations (deemed to be "legal persons") to make continual profits and having an almost unlimited right to Earth's limited resources.

Fourth, the critical factor to turning things around is to see ourselves as earthlings in a new and different world. Scientists tell us that we have come from Earth through the process of evolution. Our consciousness is part of a conscious universe reflecting upon itself. Inherent in these fundamental realities is that we are co-creators. We must realize that Earth has been stewarding us since time immemorial. We must commit ourselves to a mission: helping Earth heal itself.

Fifth, for the most part human environmental laws are not designed to protect Earth. They are designed to limit the amount of damage we can do to Earth. But, historically, Earth has had its own laws and there is an emerging Earth Jurisprudence. Earth laws still exist but, with the possible exceptions of indigenous cultures around the world, they are ignored. Earth Law must be the foundation of the new culture and human laws must flow from them.

Moving Forward

Does all of this by itself solve the Kinder-Morgan struggle? No it doesn't. But perhaps it helps by providing a context where both sides can work together. We cannot exist without economies, but we need living economies that can function within a living Earth. We need Earth-based laws beyond human laws that will help us protect Earth and help it flourish.

Does it seem unreasonable for us to reach back into our history and adopt cultural contexts from our past? Why should it? We are earthlings building upon our historical relationships with ancestors--relationships that are imbedded within our cellular DNA.